THE EFFECT OF STUDY ABROAD ON GRAMMATICAL ACCURACY OF INDONESIAN STUDENTS' ORAL AND WRITTEN PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

This correlational study investigates the effect of study abroad of two exchange students (SA) from Indonesia in public schools in the United States on their grammatical accuracy as compared to the oral and written performance of two first year college students through formal instruction (FI) in Indonesia never experiencing living in L2 environment. Speech samples were elicited through interview via-Skype, while writing samples were obtained through writing task. The result of this study shows that in oral and written performance, SA participants used more accurate grammar than FI participants. However, SA participants were more accurate in using the three tenses in writing (90%) than in speaking (87%), while FI participants showed different result, i.e. their grammatical accuracy of speaking (78%) was higher than that of writing (76%).

Studi korelasional ini meneliti efek studi di luar negeri untuk dua siswa Indonesia program pertukaran (SA) di sekolah negeri Amerika Serikat dalam hal ketepatan gramatikal yang dibandingkan dengan ketrampilan lesan dan tulis mahasiswa tahun pertama melalui instruksi formal (FI) di Indonesia yang belum pernah tinggal di lingkungan bahasa kedua. Sampel ketrampilan lesan dikumpulkan lewat wawancara via Skype, sedangkan sampel ketrampilan tulis diperoleh melalui tugas mengarang. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa dalam ketrampilan lesan dan tulis, akurasi gramatikal peserta SA lebih tinggi daripada peserta FI. Namun demikian, peserta SA lebih akurat dalam menggunakan tiga kala dalam mengarang (90%) daripada penggunaan kala dalam berbicara (87%), sementara peserta FI menunjukkan hasil yang berbeda, yaitu akurasi gramatikal berbicara (78%) lebih tinggi daripada akurasi gramatikal mengarang (76%).

Keywords : Study Abroad (SA), Formal Instruction (FI), Grammatical Accuracy

INTRODUCTION

Previous studies investigating oral performance of L2 learners being immersed in study abroad (SA) context have shown consistently that learners' L2 oral fluency improves significantly, but there seems to be variation of findings on complexity and accuracy depending on the length of stay and the frequency of interaction with L2 speakers (Freed, et.al., 2004; Segalowitz, et.al., 2004; Collentine, et.al., 2004; Mora, et.al., 2012). Mora and Valls-Ferrer (2012) argue that, "SA that provided learners with extensive learners with extensive L2 exposure and practice, as opposed to FI period at home, had a positive impact on learners' oral performance, leading to a more efficient integration of the cognitive processes underlying the production of fluent L2 speech." In other words, SA context provides an opportunity for pushed output and negotiated interaction to take place so that improvement in fluency is facilitated. It also creates learners in a situation where they may develop not only linguistic competence, but also other competences under the theoretical framework of communicative competence (Celce-Muria, 2007), in this case sociocultural competence, formulaic competence, interactional competence, sociocultural competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence, which are all rarely found in the classroom in L1 context.

In terms of accuracy, defined by Skehan and Foster (1999) as, "the ability to avoid error in performance, possibly reflecting higher levels of control in the language as well as a conservative orientation, that is, avoidance of challenging structures that might provoke error", as also mentioned earlier, various results are observed in some studies. Morra and Valls-Ferrer (2012), who did experimental study on 30 learners of English as a foreign language studying abroad for 3 months, found that in oral production, learners showed insignificant difference in accuracy and complexity before and after a three-month SA experience. In some other studies, however, e.g. Gunterman (1995), DeKeyser (1986), Isabelli (2000), Schell (2000), whose participants in their study had longer period of time being in SA context, it is found that SA context benefits learners on grammatical and lexical development. Responding to this issue, Collentine and Freed (2004) mentions that Brecht et.al. (1995) and Golonka (2000), "sought to better understand the preprogram variables that are likely to predict success within SA programs." Therefore, it seems that in terms of accuracy, the tendency of exposure of L2 linguistic features in L1 context to students in FI context and to SA students before SA program was begun also affects the result of these studies. In this study, the variable of longer SA period, 9 months, which arguably provided more opportunity for L2 learners to interact with NS and acculturate in native speech community, was included to see how it might significantly affect the participants' grammatical accuracy in oral and written performance and was compared to the grammatical accuracy in L2 learners' oral and written performance in FI contexts who got plenty exposures on the explicit teaching of grammar.

The result of Freed, et.al.'s (2004) study shows that the frequency of writing tasks outside of the class correlated significantly with learners' oral performance. This correlation might be related to L2 learners' metalinguistic awareness, which include the knowledge of grammatical and lexical use,

performed during writing process. When such a metalinguistic awareness is frequently retrieved, it might potentially affect learners' oral proficiency, especially in terms of grammatical accuracy, grammatical complexity, and lexical use. However, there seem to be few studies investigating learners' grammatical accuracy in writing in both SA and FI context that is compared with their accuracy in oral performance. The result of such study might actually provide interesting theoretical evidence on (1) revealing the gap between what learners are metalinguistically aware of their written production and oral production, as we might expect that in writing, learners monitor their production more actively than in speaking, (2) clarifying the other possible factors, besides monitoring, that might influence why, although L2 learners in both SA and FI contexts use complex and accurate lexical and grammatical form in writing, they do differently in oral performance, and (3) clarifying the whole aspects of communicative competence that L2 learners use to approach both types of tasks, e.g. whether they are able to express message appropriately within a certain sociocultural context of communication verbally and non verbally, or whether they are able to construct and interpret a discourse in an appropriate genre, etc. These findings later might be used to explain what is missing in FI pedagogical context, which are mostly available in SA context. This study, therefore, tried to include not only learners' oral performance data, but also learners' written sample to provide new insight on the above issues.

In relation to grammatical accuracy in oral production, Putra (2010), who did correlational study on the acquisition order of English morphemes by 13 Indonesian students aged 9 years old in an International school in Indonesia, finds that L1 grammatical forms do not interfere students' L2 oral production in L1 context. This finding is consistent with some previous findings, e.g. Brown (1973) and Dullay and Burt (1974), done in L2 context to native English speaking children. These studies show that both children in ESL or EFL context acquire the morpheme of progressive –ing earlier than past irregular, past regular, third person –s. It indicates that the concept of present progressive tense is acquired earlier than simple present tense and simple past tense. In this study, I am trying to see how such tendency also appears to relatively adult L2 learners in both SA and FI contexts and in both oral and written performance data and to see whether L1 grammatical rule affects learners' L2 oral and written production. Using these theoretical foundations, I hypothesize that learners will produce more errors in using simple past tense and simple present tense form than present progressive tense in their oral and written production. However, if L1 interferes, then it is assumed that learners will commit more errors on grammatical forms that require verb form changes, e.g. morpheme –ing in present progressive tense, third person –s in simple present tense, past irregular, and past regular, as Indonesian does not have the concept of verb inflection to indicate time reference whether an action or an event happens in the past or present, but simply uses adverb after or before or after bare verb.

Research Questions

1. What is the effect of a 9-month study abroad period on SA participants' grammatical accuracy in speaking and writing compared to FI participants' grammatical accuracy on oral and written performance?
2. Is there any pattern of grammatical accuracy of three tenses observed in this study in both FI and SA contexts and in both oral and written performance?

Hypothesis

1. SA participants will produce more accurate grammar than FI participants in oral performance as a result of their opportunity to use the language more frequently with native speakers in L2 context, but not in written performance as FI participants also get a lot of explicit grammar instruction and practice writing a lot as a result of the use of genre-based learning curriculum at school in Indonesia since grade 4 to 12 and at college in semester 1.
2. L1 grammatical rules will not interfere L2 oral and written production. Errors are predictably committed more by both SA and FI participants in simple past tense form, followed by simple present tense form, and present progressive tense.

RESEARCH METHODS

There were three data gathered in this pilot study: (1) participants' oral performance, (2) participants' written performance, and (3) information of participants' language proficiency background. In order to gather the three data, I used three instruments: (1) speaking task, (2) writing task, and (3) questionnaire. Both speaking and writing tasks were used to elicit participants' grammatical accuracy in using simple present tense, present continuous tense, and simple past tense. In speaking task, I used three different pictures of people doing some activities to elicit the production of sentences using present continuous tense, open ended and extended questions about describing something or someone to elicit participants' use in simple present tense, and another open ended and extended questions about participants' experience in the past to elicit the production of simple past tense form in their oral production. The similar types of tasks were also used in writing. I gave students a picture of people doing some activities and asked the students to describe what people are doing in the picture in order to elicit the use of present continuous tense in their writing. To elicit the production of simple present tense sentences, I asked the students to describe something or someone, while to elicit simple past tense, I asked the student to narrate their unforgettable moment in the past.

The speaking task was administered via Skype, while the writing task was done via email. After open-ended questions were asked in speaking task, extended questions were used to elicit more production of sentences using a certain target grammatical form. The writing task was untimed, so that it could reflect the metalinguistic knowledge of the participants in the three target English tenses included in this study. In each item in writing task, there were three items in total; participants were expected to write a paragraph consisting of at least 100 words.

The questionnaire was filled in by participants and sent via email, and was followed up via Skype for additional information required in data analysis.

After the data were collected, I transcribed students' oral performance data and counted marked and unmarked forms of simple present tense, present continuous tense, and simple past tense in the data. The same treatment was also done to the data of written performance. I asked two graduate students in English Language and Linguistics program, the University of Arizona whose L1 is English to determine the data that could be categorized as marked and unmarked, so that the result of the study was reliable and valid. The total number of marked and unmarked forms in each task was then calculated and changed into percentage. The result of the data, categorized as marked forms, was then compared between participants in SA context and FI context in speaking and writing in general and in each tense to see the level of grammatical accuracy in these two different contexts and in the two different types of productive skills. Besides analyzing the accuracy, I also observed the pattern of accuracy in the three tenses in two different tasks in two different contexts, which implies the pattern of acquisition of the three tenses by L2 adult learners. I used this data to investigate whether L1 forms influenced participants' grammatical accuracy and as a part of my discussion in this study.

Participants

This pilot study includes oral and written data of 4 participants. They consist of 2 exchange students (SA) from Indonesia who are studying in senior high school in the United States for 9 months and 2 first year college students (FI) in Indonesia, who have never experienced living in L2 environment. SA 1 is 18 years old and SA 2 is 17 years old, while both FI 1 and FI 2 are 19 years old. Both of SA participants live in the United States with host family, who are native speakers of English. Since the beginning of the program, they practically use English more actively in daily conversation at school and house, and communicate less in Indonesian, except in social media, phone and Skype when they communicate with their parents and friends in Indonesia. In contrast, as a result of EFL context, FI participants use English only in English class, both at school and college. Outside of the class and in the classes other than English class, both FI 1 and FI 2 use Indonesian or local language; FI 2 reported that she used Javanese more frequently than Indonesian outside of the class.

All of the participants, who were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study, have basically learnt English since grade 4 in elementary school for 2 hours a week, and 4 hours a week since grade 7 in junior high school until grade 12 in senior high school in Indonesia. Besides studying at school, all of them also reported that they attended English course, in which they studied in conversation class for 4 hours a week since they were in elementary school until senior high school. In self-rating in questionnaire, they mentioned that their English proficiency was in intermediate level, although all of them admitted that they had never taken any English proficiency test yet, such as TOEFL, TOEIC, or IELTS. In brief, it was assumed that their English proficiency, at the time the data was taken, was in intermediate to upper intermediate level, which means that they

were able to produce simple to complex sentences into a short written or oral discourse about familiar topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the data of the result of the study, it was found that both in oral and written performance, SA participants outperformed FI participants in producing grammatically correct sentences. In speaking, as shown in Table 1 below, 87% of SA participants' sentences in oral production was grammatically accurate, while FI participants only reached 78% accuracy from the whole sentences they produced orally. Similar to the data of the accuracy in oral production, SA participants produced sentences in more accurate grammar than FI participants in written task. SA participants gained 90% accuracy, while FI participants only reached 76% accuracy. These percentages indicate that the difference between the two contexts in two different tasks is not significant.

Table 1: Data of Grammatical Accuracy

	Study Abroad	Formal Instruction
Oral	87%	78%
Written	90%	76%

This insignificant difference might be caused by two factors: (1) monitoring effect during oral performance data collection, and (2) FI participants' high proficiency level on using grammatical form as a result on the exposure of explicit teaching of grammar in L1 context. As mentioned earlier, communication via-Skype was used to gather oral performance data. Participants' awareness on the recording session affected their production, especially FI participants, as they answered questions in speaking task in a relatively slow rate of speech and articulated the sentences hesitantly because they were thinking of correct grammatical and lexical forms that they would use in their sentences. FI participants also frequently asked a certain vocabulary in Indonesian during the recording if they were not sure (see the transcript below).

Transcript of FI 2

Interviewer   : So, what is the man wearing blue t-shirt doing in the picture?
FI 2   : He is (emm) … *memperhatikan penjelasan itu apa ya, Pak?*
Interviewer   : Listen?
FI 2   : Oh. He is listening to his friend's explanation.
Interviewer   : What about the woman wearing white shirt?
FI 2   : She (emm) she is (emm) reading (emm) newspaper.

As shown above in the transcript, I repeatedly asked FI participants different questions to elicit their answer in picture description tasks and two other tasks during the interview, which was different from SA participants, who

answered fluently and complexly after being given the specific question for a certain task (see transcript below).

Transcript of SA1

Interviewer	: Lica, could you tell me about this picture? What are they doing in the picture?
SA 1	: Okay. In this picture I see some people kind of discussing something, talking about something, or learning about something, like one person is pointing at something to emphasize or clarify his (emm) her sentences.
Interviewer	: Emm okay.
SA 1	: And the other people are listening to her and there is one girl looking at a paper may be trying to find something for the discussion and there are two men, the blue shirt one and the one who wears batik, who are kind of like talking to each other.

Therefore, it shows that although FI participants had high percentage of accuracy in oral performance, they were less fluent and used less complex lexical and grammatical form. In transcript of FI 2, it was also shown that although the participant did not know the verb, they knew how to correctly use it in the required form after it was supplied. It indicates that the participant has high mastery on L2 form, leading to grammatical accuracy, but not in complex lexical use and complex grammatical form. The avoidance of the use of complex lexical use and complex grammatical form was observed as FI participants were likely to speak less fluently and produce fewer sentences to prevent the making of errors. It was observed that FI participants produced fewer sentences that fulfill obligatory task requirements for data analysis in oral performance than SA participants. FI participants produced 150 sentences orally, while SA participants produced 167 sentences (see table 2, 3, 4 and 5).

In contrast, after being immersed in SA contexts for 9 months, SA participants performed not only high percentage of grammatical accuracy, but also oral fluency, grammatical complexity, and lexical use. Their grammatical accuracy in written production, 90%, also best predicted the level of accuracy they would perform in speaking. This result, therefore, confirms the finding of Freed, et.al. (2004), who mention that frequent practice in writing has high correlation with grammatical accuracy and lexical use complexity in oral performance. However, I assumed that, as also reported in the questionnaire, the opportunity of interaction with NS both inside and outside of the class in L2 context in a longer period of time help L2 learners in SA contexts acquire high level of L2 oral proficiency better than, for instance, only through exposure of writing practice without having an opportunity to use the target language in context orally, as also shown in the result of FI oral performance in this study. Thus, the result of this study is in line with the finding of some previous research, e.g. Freed, et.al. (2004), Segalowitz, et.al. (2004), Collentine, et.al. (2004), and Mora, et.al. (2012), which mentions that in oral performance, SA participants performed better in fluency than FI participants, and provides new insight that longer SA period

facilitates L2 learners improves other dimensions of oral proficiency, in this case grammatical accuracy, grammatical complexity, and lexical use.

Table 2: Data of Grammatical Accuracy of FI 1

	Simple Present		Present Progressive		Simple Past	
	Marked	Unmarked	Marked	Unmarked	Marked	Unmarked
Oral (93)	43 (86%)	7 (14%)	21 (87.5%)	3 (12.5%)	6 (31.5%)	13 (68.5%)
Written (52)	20 (100%)	0 (0%)	22 (88%)	3 (12%)	7 (100%)	0 (0%)

Table 3: Data of Grammatical Accuracy of FI 2

	Simple Present		Present Progressive		Simple Past	
	Marked	Unmarked	Marked	Unmarked	Marked	Unmarked
Oral (57)	20 (95%)	1 (5%)	15 (88%)	2 (12%)	16 (84%)	3 (16%)
Written (83)	24 (76.5%)	7 (22.5%)	8 (89%)	1 (11%)	20 (46.5%)	23 (53.5%)

Table 4: Data of Grammatical Accuracy of SA 1

	Simple Present		Present Progressive		Simple Past	
	Marked	Unmarked	Marked	Unmarked	Marked	Unmarked
Oral (122)	58 (96%)	2 (4%)	19 (86%)	3 (14%)	29 (74%)	10 (26%)
Written (70)	41 (95%)	2 (5%)	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	16 (72%)	6 (28%)

Table 5: Data of Grammatical Accuracy of SA 2

	Simple Present		Present Progressive		Simple Past	
	Marked	Unmarked	Marked	Unmarked	Marked	Unmarked
Oral (45)	25 (100%)	0 (0%)	5 (71%)	2 (29%)	13 (100%)	0 (0%)
Written (44)	33 (97%)	1 (3%)	3 (100%)	0 (0%)	6 (85%)	1 (15%)

In writing, because the task was intentionally untimed, it made both SA and FI participants have an opportunity to revise the written production in their writing task before it was submitted. Therefore, both SA and FI participants showed high percentage of grammatical accuracy in their written production and reflected their knowledge of L2 form. However, as mentioned previously, the result of grammatical accuracy in FI participants' oral performance cannot really reflect the gap between what they were metalinguistically aware during full monitoring effect and what they could perform in speaking when they less monitored their production, as some variables were likely to affect the result of their accuracy, indicating the fact that they got exposures on the explicit teaching of grammar in FI contexts, but not the use of the language in communication, so

that although they can produce grammatically accurate sentences, but they were not fluent.

In the case of SA participants, whose oral performance was more fluent than FI participants, the result of the study (see Table 1) shows that their oral performance was less monitored than their written performance. Their high percentage of grammatical accuracy in both of the tasks gave an insight on how their high proficiency in English grammar affected their high grammatical accuracy in oral performance. This result was in principle not in line with the finding of Morra and Valls-Ferrer (2012), who found that SA participants, in their study, benefited only fluency but did not modify any significant gain in complexity and accuracy. However, this result might be due to shorter period of time of their participants being immersed in SA context, which made the participants have less opportunity to interact more with native speakers. In their study, SA participants only stayed in SA context for 3 months, while in this study SA participants had been staying in SA context for at least 9 months. In this 9-month period, SA participants had more exposures on the use of English daily, so that their grammatical and lexical proficiency developed. However, the small number of both SA and FI participants in this study might also affect the result of this study. Therefore, further studies used to confirm this pilot project might include more participants who have stayed in SA contexts for 9-12 months and should include other dimensions of oral proficiency measures more comprehensively in the study, in this case complexity, accuracy, fluency, and lexis.

Table 6: Data of Grammatical Accuracy between SA and FI in each tense

	Study Abroad			FI at Home		
	Present	Progressive	Past	Present	Progressive	Past
Oral	98%	83%	81%	89%	88%	58%
Written	96%	100%	75%	86%	88%	54%

Looking back at the second research question in this study, it is found that in both SA and FI participants' oral performance, they showed consistent pattern of accuracy (See Table 6). They produced sentences in simple present tense more accurately, followed by present progressive tense, and simple past tense in the last order. While in written production, it is found that both SA and FI participants produced more accurate grammar on present progressive tense, followed by simple present tense in the second most accurate grammar produced by them, and finally simple past tense in the last position. This finding therefore confirms that L1 form does not interfere participants' L2 oral and written production.

If L1 interfered, participants would consistently produce present progressive tense later as Indonesian does not have the concept of be and inflectional verb form –ing. But, in SA and FI oral and written production, it was found that it was consistently produced more easily than simple past tense. Therefore, this result is in line with previous finding as in Putra (2010), Brown (1973) and Dullay and Burt (1974) and supports the second hypothesis proposed in this study.

CONCLUSION

The result of this study has confirmed that the exposure of the use of English in SA context is highly correlated with L2 learners' grammatical accuracy in both participants' oral and writing performance. SA participants outperformed FI participants in producing more grammatically correct sentences both in speaking and writing task. In addition to that, it was also observed that, although it was not the focus of this study, SA participants were likely to outperform FI participants, in oral fluency, grammatical complexity, and lexical use in speaking, and also the relevance of task responses, the coherence and cohesion, the lexical resource, and the grammatical range in writing.

The data collection procedure using Skype and untimed writing task, however, made all participants monitor their answer in the tasks. In speaking task, FI participants carefully answered the questions and chose less complex grammar and vocabulary, so that they were less fluent and natural in speaking as compared to SA participants. SA participants, in contrast, spoke fluently and naturally, and frequently used some informal or conversational registers of vocabulary, as they frequently use in daily conversation in L2 environment. It is an indication that besides acquiring linguistic competence, SA participants also acquire other types of communicative competences in L2 environment. This result, therefore, suggests that English teachers in Indonesia should be able to create English speaking environment in the classroom by providing comprehensible input in forms of authentic and meaningful teaching and learning materials and giving students more opportunity to practice using the language in some variety of negotiated and modified interaction tasks among the students in the classroom.

Further research might be done to investigate four dimensions of oral proficiency as proposed by Skehan (2009), in this case grammatical complexity, grammatical accuracy, speaking fluency, and lexical use, and four dimensions of writing performance, in this case task responses, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource and grammatical accuracy and range, of Indonesian students at three different settings: (1) study abroad context, (2) immersion class context in Indonesian bilingual school, in which English is primarily used as the language of instruction in the classroom, and (3) regular formal instruction in public schools, in which students only study and use English 4 hours a week in the classroom. As also mentioned earlier, there should also be bigger number of participants involved in the study, who have stayed for longer period of time in SA context, so that generalizations might be possibly done. The data collection techniques should be designed to minimize monitoring effects and done face to face. Various questions, ranging from familiar to unfamiliar topics, also need to be included in the study in order to look at how participants in the study approach such tasks.

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